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SUBJECT: ENGAGING MUSLIM POPULATION ON "DEFAMATION OF
RELIGION"

REF: A. A) STATE 128320
[1](#)B. B) MOSCOW 2708

[1](#)1. (SBU) In response to ref A request, Post has produced a plan of action for engaging both the GOR and Russia's Muslim population with the goal of ending support for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)'s "defamation of religion" resolutions in the United Nations. During our October meeting with Natalia Zolotova of the MFA's Department of Human Rights and Humanitarian Cooperation (ref B), we pointed out that these resolutions provide a disturbingly vague definition of the terms "defamation" and "religion," and expressed the concern that they could become a crude tool in the hands of any government inclined to suppress freedom of speech. Although she told us that the GOR did not intend to change its position on the UNGA "defamation of religion" resolution, Zolotova received our points with an open mind and offered only a half-hearted defense of the resolution. We believe that continued mutually respectful debate with the MFA on this issue will be valuable.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In addition to continuing our dialogue with the GOR, we also plan to meet with Muslim leaders after the January Russian New Year holiday, in order to promote greater understanding of U.S. priorities defending respect both for free expression and for religious sensitivities. We intend to open a continuing dialogue with these leaders, and, via this relationship, we plan to engage Muslim youth as well. Working with our Public Affairs Section, we will expand ongoing activities that engage Muslim students at the American Centers and Corners, universities and high schools, and informal meetings with youth groups, in which we will exchange ideas with participants and offer the U.S. perspective on religious tolerance and pluralism. Post will continue its ongoing policy of maximizing regional travel, and plans to capitalize on the Secretary's highly successful, widely publicized trip to the Republic of Tatarstan in October. Post will continue to participate in the Access Microscholarship Program, a two-year after-school English language teaching program for teenagers from low-income families in regions with predominantly Muslim population. As part of this program, in October 2009 (immediately following the Secretary's visit), Post distributed throughout Russia a book and CD-ROM with drawings and dramatizations entitled "Lessons in Kindness: Accessing English through Students' Stories." Written by Russian Access students, the teaching materials promote tolerance and respect for different cultures and nationalities.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In the wake of the Tatarstan visit, on November 26 Post received a letter from the President of Tatarstan suggesting broadened cooperation and exchanges between the U.S. and Tatarstan. Post responded positively on December 22, and noted that USAID has funded a Community Connections exchange program which will bring interfaith religious leaders from Tatarstan (as well as several other regions) to the U.S. for three to five-week homestay exchanges beginning in March 2010. Two State Department International Visitor

Leadership Programs will also bring regional religious, business, and education leaders from Tatarstan to the U.S. The December 22 letter also suggests bringing several keynote speakers (via the State Department's Speakers Program) to participate in a conference on Islam and Tolerance organized and hosted by the Government of Tatarstan, and increasing the number of American educational exchange participants in Tatarstan, where there are currently four Fulbright scholars, one Senior English Language Fellow, and nine National Strategic Language Initiative students.

Rubin